

STAT

ARTICLE APPEARED  
ON PAGE 56

PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER  
7 MAY 1982

# Ecuador ousts translators

## *U.S. missionaries worked with Indians*

By KERNAN TURNER  
Associated Press

QUITO, Ecuador. — The Bible-translating missionaries of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, who for 30 years have worked with the Indians in the mountains and jungles of Ecuador, are preparing to leave by May 29 on orders of the government.

The decision, made a year ago, stirred up a national debate over the institute's work and the future of the indigenous people the missionaries will leave behind.

At issue is whether the government will be capable of working with isolated native populations — some still living a Stone Age-type existence — or whether, as one newspaper columnist suggested, their cultures will die and their languages will become no more than "sounds lost forever among the jungle's vegetable mass and river torrents."

"It looks like we're leaving for sure," William Eddy, the institute's public relations official in Ecuador, said in a recent interview.

He added that the institute unsuccessfully appealed for an extension until 1985 to complete its mission in Ecuador, a predominantly Roman Catholic country.

The institute is the overseas arm of the U.S.-based Wycliffe Bible Translators, the world's largest Protestant missionary organization. It has more than 3,900 volunteers working in 237 other countries. About 1,000 volunteers work in Latin America.

One of its Latin American workers, Chester Allen Bitterman 3d of Lancaster, Pa., was kidnapped in neighboring Colombia in January 1981 by dissident members of the country's M-19 guerrilla movement, who charged that the institute was a front for the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency. The dissidents demanded

the institute leave Colombia. When it refused, Bitterman was killed.

The institute's contract in Ecuador, like those in other countries, permits it to investigate aboriginal languages in return for assistance to government-approved health, bilingual education and agricultural projects.

Its prime objective — introducing primitive people to Christianity — has come under fire in recent years by anthropologists who claim that it threatens the traditional religious and cultural values of the indigenous people.

Other opponents of the organization, including Latin American leftist groups, social workers and human-rights advocates and some anthropologists, maintain that the institute wittingly or unwittingly serves the interests of the United States, especially by opening the jungles to U.S. oil companies by serving as intermediaries with hostile Indians.

More extreme charges, such as those made by the M-19 dissidents in Colombia, are that the missionaries are CIA agents, smugglers and advocates of enforced sterilization.

The institute has denied all these charges.

The Ecuadoran government claims that a major reason for ending its contract with the institute was to stop the debate.

"The government position is clear," Vladimir Serrano Pérez, undersecretary of government, said recently. "Ecuador is sufficiently mature to handle the cultural problems which exist in the country and to resolve them in an efficient manner."

He said an anthropological institute would be established with support from the Catholic University of Ecuador and the United Nations

Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to take over the missionaries' operations.

"The government insists there are trained personnel prepared to take over the linguistic program," Eddy said. "But they are not out there."

Eddy's opinion is shared by most newspapers in the country, which generally have lamented the departure of the institute.

Indian organizations are divided on the issue. Many of the most primitive people are so removed from the mainstream of Ecuadoran society that they are not aware their fate is of national concern.

One anthropologist who supports the institute is Julio Vela of the National Institute for the Colonization of the Amazon Region.

"The departure of the institute will result in a total disruption of medical, clothing, hospital, transport and commercial services," he said, because no one is prepared to replace the missionaries.

He predicted increased tribal hostility and the eventual assimilation of the Indians into modern-day Ecuadoran life.

The 50 institute missionaries in Ecuador include 22 linguists assigned to eight language groups, the Cayapa, Cofan, Colorado, Huaorani (Auca), Shuar (Jivaro), Secoya, Siona and Quichua.

Eddy said the volunteers have completed alphabets for all eight languages but have not finished the Huaorani and Secoya dictionaries.

Only three New Testaments have been completed — in the Colorado, Cofan and Shuar languages, he added.

Eddy said the government had offered to let individual missionaries stay if they would work under government supervision.